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Review of Thunder Shaman by Ana Mariella Bacigalupo

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***Thunder Shaman* by Ana Mariella Bacigalupo. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016. 288 pp., illustrations, maps, references, index.**

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The cover of Ana Mariella Bacigalupo's *Thunder Shaman* displays a striking portrait of Francisca Kolipi Kurin, an elderly Mapuche *machi* (shaman), wearing a blue and orange headscarf, a royal blue blouse, a shining silver breastplate, holding in her right hand a bunch of branches with dark bluish green leaves. With her left hand, she points to the cloud-filled sky, as though invoking the power of thunder. The image is prophetic, biblical, something like the Book of Ezekiel, when God approaches Ezekiel as the divine warrior riding in his battle chariot and commissions him as a prophet and watchman in Israel. I make this comparison because the book is intended to be a shamanic 'bible' written in collaboration with the author, an anthropologist. As such, this project is unique, though it can be included within a new and exciting genre of co-productions that has emerged in South American studies of shamanism.

The Bible, of course, is the single most widely read book among indigenous peoples the world over. But for indigenous peoples to produce their own 'bibles' containing the powers of outstanding shamanic leaders is extraordinary. To be sure, there are Mapuche "mystics" who have written their own "mystical bibles" parallel to the Hebrew texts. *Thunder Shaman* does not follow in the same lineage as the Mapuche mystical bibles that seek to legitimate Mapuche shamanic practice in the eyes of the Chilean majority by linking it to broader Chilean notions of religions.

The author was an apprentice/helper to Francisca Kolipi, a Mapuche thunder shaman, whose life-history deeply influenced the Mapuche of her southern Chilean community of Millali. Francisca always worked with a 'bible' in her curing rituals. Before she passed, she made an agreement with the author to write her (Francisca's) 'bible', a book that would contain her powers, explain where they came from, and how they were returned to the ancestral shamanic spirit. *Thunder Shaman* is thus imbued with Francisca's powers. In reality, it is a blend of many powerful elements, for the author, with characteristic elegance and dedication, weaves multiple narratives and analytic modes/perspectives into a superbly crafted gem. This review can only touch upon why I believe this book is a tour-de-force in studies of shamanic historical consciousness, Mapuche historicity, and machi relations to the images and processes imposed on the Mapuche by the Chilean state. It is, in many ways, highly relevant to Lowland South American ethnography.

The author established her scholarly reputation in South American studies of shamanism with *Shamans of the Foye Tree* (Bacigalupo 2007), a study of Mapuche shamans' gender identities and performance, in which she examines the intersections of spiritual, social, and political power. She deepens her inquiry in the present work by focusing on a single machi. Francisca Kolipi, the machi portrayed here, is deeply linked to the spiritual lineage of Mapuche thunder shamans and the interethnic conflicts between the ancestors of her community and historical agents of contact.

Since the early 1980s, ethnologists of Amazonia and Highland South America have engaged in a tremendously fruitful dialogue with history, initiated by the landmark volume *Rethinking History and Myth* (Hill 1988) and developed significantly in the volumes of the *Cambridge History of Native Peoples of the Americas* (Schwartz and Salomon 1999). In both, scholars went to great lengths to deconstruct the ahistorical image of indigenous Amazonians stuck eternally in cycles of time. Contact narratives, biographies, histories of the *longue durée*, indigenous notions of historicity, and other forms of "ethnohistory" constituted the

burgeoning field of “indigenous history” that developed throughout the 1990s and the first decade of this century. For example, shamanic histories of the prophet movements of the Tupi-Guarani, northern Carib, and the Northwest Amazon demonstrated that native societies engaged the circumstances of contact with nation-states and the structures of their creation stories, shaping and transforming histories according to their ideals.

Bacigalupo advances the dialogues between Highland and Lowland ethnography, mutually benefitting both through the perspective of “shamanic historic consciousness.” Shamanic historic consciousness is about reshaping the events of history through dreams, possession, narrative, and powerful objects. Shamanic historical agency is a concept in which shamans blend narratives about the primordial world with the present and different moments of the past, within which the historical agency of mythical beings, spirits, and humans intertwine. Shamanic histories convey this historical agency, the capacity for meaningful action both within and upon larger social forces, and also express ideas about ethnic identity, personhood, and ontology. Mapuche shamanic narratives, the author argues, draw on a notion of spiritual agency that underlies the transformative nature of Mapuche personhood and identity.

Mapuche thunder shamans are extraordinary individuals who have lived through powerfully transformative experiences. Francisca was struck by lightning during the devastating earthquake of 1960 in Chile. At that time people in the rural community of Millali said that the spirit of a thunder shaman named Rosa Kurin from southern Argentina struck thirty-nine-year-old Francisca with a lightning bolt and possessed her, thereby transforming her into a machi. Francisca recalled to the author:

My stomach felt as if they had cut it off, I ripped off my sweater and my shoes. I was like crazy. My head was drunk . . . The sky opened and I was hit by lightning. [The spirits] brought me down my *kuiltrung* [drum]. Then I looked upward and they gave me all the remedies I should use. They got my right arm and gave it power. I drummed and prayed and the earthquake stopped. I saved the world (pp. 1–3).

Soon after, Francisca had a dream with a Catholic reference:

I went up a big thick pole to the Wenu Mapu [Mapuche sky]. Just like on the day of Saint Peter, the sky opened up . . . And they gave me clover, beans, maize, potatoes, wheat, lentils . . . As I was coming down an old man with a long moustache said, ‘I am going to give you luck’ (pp. 3–4).

Like all shamans, Francisca acquired the powers to transcend human time, not only in the sense of moving in between primordial and present-day realities, but also by constantly working in *multitemporal realities*: her spirit was “of the past,” living “in the present,” yet “of the future” as well (p. 71). This book is, in large measure, an elaboration of the meanings and repercussions of this multitemporality.

There is another, notable way in which the narratives of *Thunder Shamans* resonate with the literature on shamans of lowland South America that focus on hybrid identities. Francisca was a *champurria*, a bicultural mestizo (like the half-Quechua author of the work under review), and as other well-known and powerful lowland shamans, she was a mediator between the worlds of Indians and foreigners, the living and the dead, bridging sociopolitical, ethnic, and spiritual divides for the benefit of her community. She resembles Juan Santos Atahualpa (a Quechua Indian educated by priests) and Venancio Kamiko (a Baniwa jaguar shaman educated by a black Catholic “priest”). Both had spiritual knowledge that allowed them to foretell the future and oppose the world of whites. Both Baniwa and Mapuche conceive colonization by whites through the idiom of sorcery. And, like Francisca’s spiritual mentor Rosa, Venancio Kamiko and his spiritual “son” Uetsu believed they were stronger than the whites and waged war against sorcerers in moments when new social relations were being forged, ritual activity proliferated, and millenarian concerns and the desire to “avoid the whites” was spreading (Wright 2013). Juan Santos Atahualpa led Amazonian Arawakan and Panoan peoples in a revolt to throw off Spanish rule and expel

Franciscan missionaries. He transformed Christianity and argued that Spanish priests should be replaced by native clerics. Venancio Kamiko took on a priestly role and assumed the title of 'Christu', arguing that Arawakans could perform their own rituals and had no use for missionaries.

The narrative of Rosa, Francisca's mentor, however, is unique among South American indigenous shamanic leaders in that she did not incorporate and reshape aspects of Christianity "to meet the spiritual needs" of her community, nor did she propose a reversal of the dominant order of foreign settlers in favor of a Mapuche one. The Mapuche in Millali place Rosa in a sacred space and time and see her as *creating* a new interethnic order.

Machi are mounted spiritual warriors who ride on horses carrying messages between humans and the divine. This is a wonderful metaphor of the sorts of "mobile narratives" and spiritual vehicles discussed in Chapter 2. Such narratives do something similar to "messianic myths" (cf. Turner 1988), challenging colonizers' notions of "civilization," subjecting them to shamanic logic, and thereby annulling the history of colonization. In the particular case of Rosa who, like her spiritual "daughter" Francisca, was of mixed Mapuche-German identity, the mobile narratives incorporate historical German colonizers as agents of cosmic chaos into the logic of machi shamanism and then "obliterate the Devil's 'civilized history'" (p. 31).

The multitemporal visions in machi dreams, visions, and trance states are explored in Chapter 3; these "allow machi to switch between and combine time periods to produce and reshape history" (p. 71). Machi are not alone in multi-temporal positioning, however, since Mapuche sorcerers can also utilize multi-temporality to work their influence in, for example, dreams. By comparison, sorcerers in Amazonia appear in the dreams of their victims with the spiritual bodies of primordial sorcerers in order to steal their souls, while the sorcerers described by Bacigalupo "promote factionalism, destroy knowledge and family" (p. 71).

Machi perception of illness and healing are extensively discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to histories of ethnic conflict. The notion of "embodied history" is critical here, referring to "sensory bodily cultural memories" (after Stoller 1995) that are translated in the machis' bodies as postures, gestures, and movements that in turn convey and "even produce history, power, and knowledge" (p. 100). The analysis challenges "classic phenomenological approaches to shamanism" by arguing that shamans' experiences of altered states of consciousness can be linked to "alternative modes of historicization" (p. 100) in which the past is mediated by the body of the possessed machi and comes into the present, thereby allowing for the healing of historic wounds left by ethnic conflicts. Divination, ritual sacrifice, and other modes of multi-temporality are embodied strategies for such healing.

How indigenous peoples produce written sacred texts, use them to make political statements, narrate alternative histories, and thereby circulate shamanic power are questions analyzed in the following chapter. The author explores the intersection among spiritual agency, literary practices, and history. The analysis explicitly questions the dichotomy of written and oral cultures that so often parallels the contrast between civilized and primitive (p. 139). Through the production of their bibles, machi subdue the hegemonic "other" using the cultural tools at their disposal (p. 151).

In Chapter 6, the author's discussion builds on the theme of "savage" and "civilized" explored earlier in the book, the kind of rhetoric that refers to constructions of the other, in particular the state and its agents. Bacigalupo analyzes the complex and contradictory ways in which Francisca and other people in Millali used hegemonic and counterhegemonic understandings of the "time of wilderness and warfare" to articulate conflicts within the community during its wars with the Chilean state, Pinochet's military regime, and subsequent democratic and authoritarian governments.

Chapter 7 is a powerful narrative of Francisca's death and transformation into ancestral spirit, a complex series of moments in deconstructing the person, a ritual time richly reconstructing the process of remembering and disremembering the powerful figure of Francisca through the narrative of this 'bible'. Far more than Francisca's actual passing away was involved because, as with all shamans, there were other moments in her life when she 'died' and later returned to life. The entire discussion revolves around processes of

mythologizing and historicizing, “how discourses of disremembering and the transformation of memory may both assert and deny social persistence and cohesion” (p. 200).

As a whole, the book challenges both Mapuche and non-Mapuches’ construction of history and contemporary representations of historical continuity. Bacigalupo’s narrative about Francisca makes evident the discrepancy between the history of Millali at different times—a “discontinuous series of presents that are now all past”—and the current ethnography of Millali in which the community “creates a seamless, mythologized narrative about the past from the present” (p. 232). Through the constant interplay of narratives from the primordial past, the recent past, and biography, the book captures the ways in which the Mapuche machi are “constituted by historical-political events, while they actively and imaginatively constitute those same events through shamanic imaginaries and narrative forms” (p. 11).

A central question accompanies the reader throughout the narrative: the intertextuality of author and machi. *Thunder Shaman* is the realization of the shaman’s wish, but the text is interwoven with the author’s anthropological analyses. Mapuche notions of history, the sacred, and bibles themselves are thereby explored. The Mapuche expected not only the intertextuality of Francisca’s words and the author’s analysis, but also the ‘intertextuality’ of their spirits. How was this possible? Mapuche have relational personhoods, and Francisca and others conceived the author’s relationship with her in those terms. The ‘bible’ is thus conceived as a joint project. The ethnography of Francisca’s life history and practice between 1991 and 1996 is the author’s personal commitment to her, which she felt she needed to fulfill so that Francisca’s individual spirit would completely disengage from the author and become an autonomous machi spirit. There is a collective recognition of this spirit as the blending of Rosa Kurin’s and Francisca Kolipi’s powers. The positive impact this work will have on the community will become part of community history, enabling the spirit to be reborn in the body of a new machi.

Bacigalupo’s role as anthropologist/ritual helper certainly went a long way towards transforming Millali community members’ ways of telling their history and reshaping Mapuche perceptions of shamanism and writing. The co-production of a ‘bible’ with Francisca analyzes why Mapuche retold Francisca’s story in a particular way; it includes the history of the production of these narratives and the refashioning of Francisca’s subjectivity over time. Francisca, on the other hand, viewed the ‘bible’ as a potent shamanic object with a performative function (p. 153): it would store and textualize her power, circulate it through time and space, heal, and enable communication between the living and the dead.

How then do the two perspectival planes, of author and subject, merge? On the intellectual plane, the project is “trans-epistemic” in Alcida Ramos’ sense of the term (2012). How is this work distinct from, say, the magisterial narrative constructed by the Yanomami shaman, Davi Kopenawa, and his ethnologist interlocutor, Bruce Albert (2013)? Or, outside of Amazonia, the equally powerful work by Manduhai Buyandelger on the Buryat, *Tragic Spirits: Shamanism, Memory, and Gender in Contemporary Mongolia* (2013)?

Kopenawa’s objective was to raise political consciousness in the West and to provoke a deeply transformative experience in readers, including the anthropological “specialists” whose analytical voices have until now drowned out the voices of the native. It is hardly a ‘bible’ in the sense of *Thunder Shaman*, though all three texts make enormous strides in advancing the genre of politically and spiritually motivated shamanic statements. Both Buyandelger’s and Bacigalupo’s books explore the histories of past massacres, the idea of “mobile histories,” and the analysis of state relations to indigenous peoples as mediated by the shamans. *Tragic Spirits* focuses on the interpretation of the narratives of shamans and clients, while *Thunder Shaman* includes both the narrative and embodied dimensions of shamanism and is more personal as it weaves together the experience of shaman Francisca and the author.

Students, scholars, and all who read *Thunder Shaman* will certainly be transformed as well. One cannot help but feel the power of Francisca being transmitted through the image on the cover and the illustrations throughout the book. Indeed, the very confection of the book has the “feel” of a biblical text. Francisca Kolipi surely seems to be speaking the words that her spiritual “daughter” in life left on paper for her—a spiritual legacy that lives on, transforming, guiding, shaping, healing, as she wished. In that sense, the author and the

shaman have gifted us with their spiritual journeys, making a significant advance in the interlocutory process in which both shamanic spiritual and analytic objectives work together in a singularly creative way.

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